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# MERRICKS'S SOULLESS SAVIOR

Luke Van Horn

Trenton Merricks has recently argued that substance dualist accounts of embodiment and humanness do not cohere well with the Incarnation. He has also claimed that physicalism about human persons avoids this problem, which should lead Christians to be physicalists. In this paper, I argue that there are plausible dualist accounts of embodiment and humanness that avoid his objections. Furthermore, I argue that physicalism is inconsistent with the Incarnation.

Trenton Merricks has recently argued that the best account of the divine Son's becoming flesh is that the Son became a material object.<sup>1</sup> More specifically, Merricks has claimed that

The incarnation points us toward physicalism. For the physicalist, unlike the dualist, can insist that becoming embodied is necessary for becoming human; she can insist that the Incarnation requires the Son to become incarnate. Moreover, and more importantly, the physicalist—but not the dualist—can easily and straightforwardly account for God the Son's having the body of Jesus and no other.<sup>2</sup>

There are at least three distinct claims being advanced here: (1) substance dualism (hereafter “dualism”) does not cohere well with the doctrine that the Son is uniquely embodied in Jesus' body<sup>3</sup>; (2) dualism entails that a person can be human without being embodied, which is objectionable; and (3) physicalism about human persons (hereafter “physicalism”) avoids these problems and thus provides for a superior account of the incarnation.

In this paper I shall rebut all three of Merricks's claims. Specifically, I shall argue that his objections to dualism fail to adequately consider alternative dualist accounts of embodiment and humanness. Furthermore, while physicalism does provide an account of embodiment that avoids his objections to dualism, its account of incarnation requires accepting so

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<sup>1</sup>Trenton Merricks, “The Word Made Flesh: Dualism, Physicalism, and the Incarnation,” in *Persons: Human and Divine*, ed. Peter van Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), pp. 281–300.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 299.

<sup>3</sup>He argues further that dualism seems to entail both that the Son is embodied in more objects than simply Jesus' body and that the Father and Spirit are also embodied.



many counterintuitive metaphysical principles that it is not an appealing alternative to dualism.

Before I begin, there are two important points of agreement between Merricks and myself, and I will presuppose both in this paper. First, the incarnation should be understood as the claim that the second Person of the Trinity became a human being, which minimally requires that he be related to his body in the same way that we are related to our bodies.<sup>4</sup> Thus, I shall not consider as options for the dualist accounts of the incarnation in which the second person of the Trinity *assumes* a human being.<sup>5</sup> Second, I shall not consider a kenotic approach to the incarnation as a way of escaping Merricks's arguments.<sup>6</sup>

### I. Dualist Embodiment

The primary dualist account of embodiment that Merricks targets is Richard Swinburne's: "A person has a body if there is a chunk of matter through which he makes a difference to the material world, and through which he acquires true beliefs about that world."<sup>7</sup> Merricks takes this to mean that a soul *x* is embodied in a material object *y* iff *x* has direct causal control over *y* and *y* causes *x* to have sensory knowledge.<sup>8</sup> Merricks's principal objection to this is that it entails that all three members of the Trinity are embodied in every material object. Why? The divine persons are omnipotent, so they have direct causal control over every material object.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, their knowledge of what is happening in the world is caused by what happens in the world.

I assume that, typically, God knows something is happening because it is happening, and not the other way round. God knows what is happening in

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 281–282. Perhaps this needs qualification, since he is the creator of his body, while we are not. Nevertheless, the relation we stand in to our bodies, the second person of the Trinity stands in to his body, whatever other relations he also stands in to it.

<sup>5</sup>E.g., Eleonore Stump, "Aquinas' Metaphysics of the Incarnation," in *The Incarnation*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 197–218; Thomas P. Flint, "The Possibilities of Incarnation: Some Radical Molinist Suggestions," *Religious Studies* 37 (2001), pp. 307–320; Thomas D. Senor, "The Compositional Account of the Incarnation," *Faith and Philosophy* 24.1 (2007), pp. 52–71. Given my own understanding of the Incarnation, I am tempted to explain the difference between the view Merricks and I share and the "assumption" view by claiming that on the latter, the Son *assumes* rather than *becomes* a human being, but Tom Flint has convinced me that that is far too tendentious and misleading a description (however accurate I think it is). It is worth noting that many who hold such views claim that the referents of "Jesus," "Son," and "second person of the Trinity" are distinct. In this paper, I understand all of them to refer to the same person, exactly like "Kal El," "Clark Kent," and "Superman" would if there were such a person.

<sup>6</sup>Merricks, "The Word Made Flesh," pp. 288–289. Kenotic theories of the incarnation claim that the second person of the Trinity ceased to be omniscient, omnipotent, etc., while in his state of humiliation (i.e., while incarnate but before his resurrection and glorification).

<sup>7</sup>Richard Swinburne, *The Evolution of the Soul*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 146.

<sup>8</sup>Merricks takes Swinburne's account to require the body to cause knowledge in the soul, rather than merely true belief, as Swinburne states.

<sup>9</sup>Merricks, "The Word Made Flesh," pp. 284–285.

my body because it is happening there. Moreover, God knows that when particular experiences in my body are caused in particular ways, certain things are happening in the world around that body. Thus, God knows about goings-on in the world because of events in my body. (Of course, God also knows about those goings-on directly.) So it seems that events in my body cause knowledge of the world in each person of the Trinity. At any rate, it is hard to see a principled way of ruling out causation in this case without thereby ruling out something to which the Christian dualist is committed—events in the body of Jesus causing knowledge in God the Son.<sup>10</sup>

For anyone familiar with the debates over divine providence and foreknowledge, it sounds like Merricks is here presupposing a radical version of open theism.<sup>11</sup> But proponents of many alternative views of providence will be unmoved. For example, a theological determinist of the Calvinist or Thomist sort could resist this argument by denying that God knows contingent truths about the world by being caused to know them by contingent objects. Rather, God causally determines everything that happens, and thus knows everything about creation by knowing his own intentions (or, as it was often stated, “by knowing his own essence”). And the argument will not move the Molinist, who holds that God’s providential decree included every last detail in the entire history of the world, so that God knows everything that happens in the world merely by conjoining his middle knowledge with his knowledge of his decree to actualize this world rather than another.<sup>12</sup> Proponents of simple foreknowledge may also reject the argument, since it would entail that God’s foreknowledge is a product of backwards causation. Even other open theists could resist Merricks’s argument, for they could maintain that God knows what is happening in the world through his rational intuition. Perhaps every proposition, even those contingently true (and even tensed), is as self-evidently true to God as that  $2 + 2 = 4$  is to us.<sup>13</sup>

Does Merricks provide an argument for thinking that the above views are all false (the views of the vast majority of Christians throughout the history of Christianity), and that the radical open theist view he appears to present has the correct account of God’s knowledge? No. But is there perhaps something in dualist theism, missing from bare theism (or bare Christian theism), that implies that God’s knowledge of creation is caused by his creation? Does the dualist’s dualism somehow preclude her from

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 286–287.

<sup>11</sup>I doubt he really was presupposing Open Theism, as he has endorsed Molinism in writing. See his *Truth and Ontology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), pp. 146–155. If it is not an expression of Open Theism, though, the meaning of the passage is unclear.

<sup>12</sup>Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), chap. 2. If one were to object that this is not sufficient, since such a conjunction would not give God knowledge of which tensed propositions are true now, the Molinist can simply add to his account that God always knows directly, through his perfect rational intuition, what time it is, and so which tensed propositions are true now.

<sup>13</sup>William Lane Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom: The Coherence of Theism: Omniscience* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), pp. 226–236.

denying that such a causal relation holds? I see no good reason—and particularly nothing in dualism—that suggests that material entities cause knowledge in God, and again Merricks does not supply such a reason.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, the dualist can admit that the Trinitarian persons have direct causal control over every material object, but deny that they are therefore embodied, since these objects do not cause knowledge within them. But what then of Merricks's complaint that this would preclude the incarnation, since Jesus' body would not cause him to have any knowledge? I see little force to this objection. Since Jesus is omniscient, his body does not cause him to know anything he does not already know. But this does not preclude some of his knowledge from being overdetermined. Perhaps Jesus' body causes him to know things that he already knew anyhow. As an illustration of this, suppose that most of what Jesus (while incarnate, but pre-glorification) knew was subconscious or non-occurrent.<sup>15</sup> Material objects would then cause Jesus' body to cause Jesus to know certain propositions occurrently and thereby overdetermine his knowledge of them.

Whether these replies on Swinburne's behalf are any good, I am in the end inclined to think that Merricks is right to reject this view of embodiment, for it is implausible on other grounds. For example, it appears to entail that the *seriously* insane or those suffering from *massive* cognitive or neurophysiological malfunction are disembodied, since beliefs they form on the basis of sense experience will not count as knowledge. In addition, it entails that very young children, at least those in the first several weeks of their existence, are disembodied, since they presumably hold no beliefs, or at least none that meet all the conditions for knowledge (whatever those are). Nevertheless, there are alternative dualist accounts of embodiment which avoid these problems and also avoid Merricks's objections to Swinburne. Merricks briefly mentions and criticizes one of these, but the dualist has an available reply.<sup>16</sup>

As argued above, insisting that embodiment occurs only when the body causes knowledge in the soul is implausible. However, a relatively simple alternative would be an experience requirement. For *S* to be embodied in *x* is for *S* to have direct causal control over *x* and for *x* to cause sensory experiences in *S*. On this account, there is no bar to the Son's being embodied, since his omniscience does not preclude sensory experiences. Moreover,

<sup>14</sup>One might object that, on a counterfactual account of causation, physical goings-on do cause knowledge in God, since, if they were to not happen, God would not have knowledge of them. Rather than suppose that this is a point in Merricks's favor, I would take this as yet another reason to reject a counterfactual account of causation.

<sup>15</sup>J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), pp. 610–612.

<sup>16</sup>Merricks only discusses accounts of embodiment open to classical Cartesians. There are other versions of dualism, like those that claim that souls are spatially located or causally regulate their bodies' biological functions, that can also give accounts of embodiment that avoid his criticisms. See, for example, Philip L. Quinn, "Tiny Selves: Chisholm on the Simplicity of the Soul," in *The Philosophy of Roderick M. Chisholm*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn (Chicago: Open Court, 1997), pp. 61–66; and J. P. Moreland and Scott B. Rae, *Body & Soul: Human Nature & the Crisis in Ethics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), pp. 199–228.

the insane and the neurophysiologically defective still have experiences, even if they do not acquire knowledge on the basis of them. Merricks's objection to this account is that it entails that when I am in a deep, dreamless sleep, I am disembodied, since my body is not causing any sensations in my soul. "My soul might leave my body when I die, but not when I dreamlessly sleep!"<sup>17</sup>

Fortunately, the account can be modified to avoid this implication. Instead of requiring that the body actually cause sensations in the soul, the body should only be required to be *disposed* to cause sensations if it is in certain circumstances. Peter Unger and John Foster offer versions of this account of embodiment.<sup>18</sup> An account of embodiment adopting this suggestion would be as follows: *S* is embodied in *x* iff *S* has direct causal power over *x* and *x* is causally disposed to cause effects in *S*.<sup>19</sup>

Merricks offers two objections to such an account. First, this makes embodiment counterfactually dependent on non-actual circumstances, when intuitively it should be dependent on what is actual. Second, the account entails that disembodiment is impossible.

Consider a disembodied soul, whose former body has died. If that body were in sense-experience-causing conditions—conditions presumably requiring it to be alive—then I suppose the soul would have the appropriate experiences. After all, the nearest counterfactual situation in which, for example, Lincoln's body is now alive is presumably, given dualism, a situation in which Lincoln's soul is embodied.<sup>20</sup>

The dualist can resist these objections. Concerning dependence on non-actual circumstances, I don't see why this is such a large bullet to bite. But if one is worried by the objection, I don't see why the dualist cannot reject counterfactual analyses of causal dispositions as insufficient. As for the latter objection (which seems to assume a counterfactual analysis of dispositions), Merricks is focusing on the wrong counterfactual conditions. While it is true that *If Lincoln's body were alive, he would be embodied*,<sup>21</sup> the proponent of the Foster/Unger account of embodiment thinks that Lincoln is embodied only if a counterfactual like *If Lincoln's body is punched, he feels pain* is true. That counterfactual is currently not true (and

<sup>17</sup>Merricks, "The Word Made Flesh," p. 288.

<sup>18</sup>Peter Unger, *All the Power in the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 456–460; and John Foster, *The Immaterial Self: A Defence of the Cartesian Dualist Conception of the Mind* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 167. Foster appeals to individualistic causal laws rather than individualistic causal dispositions, but the resultant account of embodiment is basically the same as Unger's.

<sup>19</sup>Tom Flint has suggested that the account should be modified further so that *S* only be required to be disposed to have direct causal power over *x*. Without this modification, the account is subject to counterexamples involving paralyzing drugs, as they seem to temporarily remove direct causal power, yet surely paralyzed people can be embodied. I'm inclined to think that Flint is correct here, but since Merricks does not raise this objection, I won't worry about cluttering up the account in the body of the paper to fix this defect.

<sup>20</sup>Merricks, "The Word Made Flesh," p. 288 n. 10.

<sup>21</sup>Or perhaps not, if body-switching is possible.

wouldn't be true even if his body had been preserved like Lenin's), so he is not embodied.<sup>22</sup>

Merricks therefore has no good objection to this account of embodiment. It allows souls to be disembodied. It allows the Son to be embodied in one body only, and for the Father and Spirit to remain unembodied. The account also survives the objections I have raised to the other accounts discussed, for there is no problem with the insane, the neurologically malfunctioning, or young children being embodied.

I have argued that Merricks's objections to several dualist accounts of embodiment are not compelling (and have sketched others that he did not mention). While I have doubts about some of them, each one allows for the unique incarnation of the Son. I therefore conclude that Merricks's first claim, that dualism cannot provide a workable analysis of embodiment and dualistic incarnation, is false.

## *II. Humanness*

Merricks's second major contention is that embodiment, for dualists, is neither necessary nor sufficient for being human.

But I would prefer an account of the Incarnation according to which the Son's coming to have a human body is at least a necessary condition for his becoming human. Dualism, as we have seen, is not such an account. Dualism makes the Son's becoming human one thing and his becoming embodied something else altogether. This is my second Incarnation-based objection to dualism.<sup>23</sup>

What is his support for the claim that being human does not entail being embodied? Merricks asserts that "dualists typically allow that you and I can continue to exist—and continue to be human—after our body dies, even before resurrection."<sup>24</sup> If we remain human after death, then it is possible to be human without being embodied. But if this is possible, then presumably the Son could have become human without acquiring a human body, and Merricks takes this to be objectionable.

But worse, being embodied is not sufficient for being human, and so dualism allows for an account of the incarnation like the following, which Merricks labels "The Heretical Theory":

God the Son is fully divine. But he is not fully human. Nevertheless, ever since the virgin conception and birth over two thousand years ago, he has been related to the body of Jesus just as a normal human soul is related to its body. So God the Son controls the body of Jesus. Moreover, he knows what happens in and around that body. He even has experiences such as hunger and pain and seeing red caused by that body.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>I am very grateful to two reviewers for comments on my previous handling of this objection, as well as to Kenny Boyce for very helpful conversation.

<sup>23</sup>Merricks, "The Word Made Flesh," p. 293.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*



Again, the dualist can resist this objection. First, there is nothing in dualism that requires that it be possible to become human without being embodied. It is my impression that dualists (at least those who are philosophers) typically believe that we are neither essentially human nor human while disembodied.<sup>26</sup> Alvin Plantinga, for example, argues that

The property of being a human person (as opposed to that of being a divine person or an angelic person or a person *simpliciter*) may entail the possession of a body; it may be that whatever, in a given world, has the property of being a human person has a body in that world. It does not follow that Socrates, who is in fact a human person, has the property of having a body in every world he graces.<sup>27</sup>

Swinburne claims that although a soul can survive the destruction of its body, “such a soul would not then, on the understanding which I have given to ‘man’ . . . be a man . . .”<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Moreland and Craig claim that to be human just is to be a rational soul embodied in a human body, entailing that we lose humanness during disembodiment.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, dualists have good reason to hold this view. Suppose that after I die, God creates a Klingon body and causes me to be embodied in it. Am I still human? Obviously not, for I’m Klingon. But then consider me after the death of my human body and a Klingon after the death of his body. Why think that one of us is human and one of us is Klingon, since either of us could be embodied in either type of body? It seems the natural thing to say is that neither of us is human or Klingon. Rather, we are simply rational souls capable of being embodied in a variety of types of bodies (Hobbit, Kryptonian, even Hutt). Contrary to Merricks’s portrayal, dualists have good reasons to think that embodiment is a necessary condition of being human.

Second, it is not clear that dualism can be tarred with “The Heretical Theory.” Is it really possible to be embodied in a human body and yet fail to be human? Plantinga famously argued that Socrates could have been an alligator, since it is possible for Socrates to be embodied in an alligator body.<sup>30</sup> If so, then embodiment is not only necessary but sufficient for being an alligator, and presumably the same goes for being human. But even if Plantinga is wrong, what is to prevent the dualist from avoiding “The Heretical Theory” by adding to his account of the incarnation the claim that the Son also had whatever properties are, with embodiment, sufficient for humanness? For example, some dualists have proposed that

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<sup>26</sup>In Merricks’s defense, I am aware of an account of the incarnation that appears to endorse the possibility of our being disembodied humans and the Son’s becoming human without becoming embodied. See Garrett J. DeWeese, “One Person, Two Natures: Two Metaphysical Models of the Incarnation,” in *Jesus in Trinitarian Perspective*, ed. Fred Sanders and Klaus Issler (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), pp. 135–149, especially 141 and 144.

<sup>27</sup>Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 67.

<sup>28</sup>Swinburne, *The Evolution of the Soul*, pp. 146–147.

<sup>29</sup>Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, pp. 608–609.

<sup>30</sup>Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, p. 65.



in addition to acquiring a human body, the Son also voluntarily limited his conscious awareness to the types of things humans are typically aware of. While still omniscient, the majority of his knowledge was subconscious or non-occurrent.<sup>31</sup> There is nothing here inconsistent with dualism, and it seems hard to deny that a person with a human body and a human type of consciousness is human.

Merricks stated that "I would prefer an account of the Incarnation according to which the Son's coming to have a human body is at least a necessary condition for his becoming human." I reply that dualism, as we have seen, is precisely such an account. Without a body, the Son is no more human than he is Kryptonian. It is in acquiring a body of a certain type, perhaps with limiting his consciousness, that he becomes human.<sup>32</sup> Thus, Merricks's second objection to dualism fails.

### III. Physicalism

Merricks's third main contention is that Christians should be physicalists about human persons, for physicalism does not face the objections he raised against dualism. Merricks's animalist version of physicalism says that a person *P* is embodied in body *x* iff *P* is identical to *x*.<sup>33</sup> There is thus no problem with the Son's being uniquely embodied in Jesus' body, for the Son is identical to that body and no other. Nor is there a problem with the Father and the Spirit being embodied in Jesus' body, for they are not identical to that body (or any other). Moreover, physicalism requires the Son to become incarnate in order to become human, for to become human is just to become a human body. Physicalism thus avoids the problems dualists are faced with, and so is a superior account of human persons and the incarnation.<sup>34</sup>

I grant that physicalism does not face these difficulties. Of course, as I've argued above, neither does dualism. Thus, physicalism has no advantage here. Indeed, I think that Merricks's physicalism is at a disadvantage. The incarnation favors dualism, not physicalism.

Plantinga has raised the following objection to Merricks-style accounts of the incarnation.

If, however, as materialists assert, to be a human being is to be a material object, then the second person of the Trinity must have become a material object. If he has remained a human being, furthermore, he is presently a

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<sup>31</sup>DeWeese, "One Person, Two Natures," pp. 145–146; Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, pp. 610–612.

<sup>32</sup>For accounts of the Incarnation along these lines, see Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 192–196; Alvin Plantinga, "On Heresy, Mind, and Truth," *Faith and Philosophy* 16.2 (1999), pp. 183–185; Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, pp. 606–613; Oliver D. Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity: The Incarnation Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 50–61.

<sup>33</sup>It is perhaps worth noting that animalism *per se* does not commit one to such an account of embodiment. See Eric Olson, *The Human Animal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 142–143.

<sup>34</sup>Merricks, "The Word Made Flesh," p. 297.

material object. But then an immaterial being became a material object; and this seems to me to be impossible. It is clearly impossible, I'd say, that the number seven or the proposition that  $7+5=12$ , or the property of self-exemplification, all of which are immaterial objects, should become, turn into, material objects. It is less clearly impossible, but still impossible, it seems to me, that the second person of the Trinity—that personal being with will and intellect and affection—should turn into a material object.<sup>35</sup>

Merricks's response to this argument is puzzling. He grants that it may seem impossible for an immaterial object to become material,<sup>36</sup> but claims that it seems just as impossible on a dualist view of persons for the Son to become human. Why is this? He claims that the intuitions against an immaterial object's becoming material rest on "kind-essentialism," the doctrine that "if something is a member of a natural kind, then it is essentially a member of that kind." Since *physical object* is a natural kind, anything physical is essentially physical, entailing that the Son cannot possibly become a physical object.<sup>37</sup> Merricks's problem with this argument is that *human soul* is also a natural kind, so the Son can no more become a human soul than he can become a physical object. Thus, kind-essentialism is inconsistent with basic Christian doctrine and so must be rejected. But once this is done, "it is hard to see why the non-physical God the Son could not become a physical human organism."<sup>38</sup>

Suppose we grant that the intuition against physicalist incarnation rests on kind-essentialism. The dualist can accept this and still dodge Merricks's objection. Why think that *human soul* is a natural kind? Merricks does not claim that the corresponding physical kind is *human body*. Rather, it is the very general *physical object*. What prevents the dualist from construing the relevant natural kind as *immaterial object* or, perhaps better, *immaterial substance*? In any case, the dualist (at least those dualists I have been discussing in this paper) will deny that *human soul* is a natural kind. A human soul is just a soul embodied in a human body. Since that soul could be embodied in non-human bodies as well, there is no more a *human soul* natural kind than there is a *Chinese soul* or *philosophy professor soul* natural kind.<sup>39</sup> Perhaps *rational soul* is a natural kind, but since the second person of the Trinity is already a member of this kind, there is no barrier to his becoming a human soul, as Merricks claims. Dualism therefore has no problem with kind-essentialism, while physicalism obviously does.

Nevertheless, Merricks's claim that Plantinga's argument presupposes kind-essentialism is dubious. Plantinga does not appeal to natural kinds. Why not think instead that he finds something impossible in the claim that something immaterial at one time becomes material at another time,

<sup>35</sup>Plantinga, "On Heresy, Mind, and Truth," p. 186.

<sup>36</sup>He does not actually grant that it seems impossible. Rather, he grants that it might seem impossible to physicalism's opponents. See Merricks, "The Word Made Flesh," p. 296.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity*, pp. 52–55.

irrespective of any kinds involved? Consequently, I suggest that the intuition that immaterial objects cannot become material does not rest on kind-essentialism, but rather on the idea that immateriality entails properties which are plausibly thought to be essentially had by everything that has them and are inconsistent with properties entailed by materiality. For example, one might plausibly think that immateriality entails non-spatiality and that nothing non-spatial could acquire a spatial location.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, an immaterial, non-spatial entity is unextended, but one might think that an unextended object could not come to be extended.

But suppose we grant that these things are indeed possible. Perhaps a soul could become some kind of point particle or even an extended simple. Merricks's account of the incarnation would still not escape the thrust of Plantinga's argument, for it does not follow that the second person of the Trinity could become a human organism. Physicalist incarnation would require, for example, that a necessary being could be wholly composed of contingent parts, and one might be doubtful about this.<sup>41</sup> Alternatively, the Son's becoming a human organism entails that it is possible for a simple—an entity with no proper parts whatsoever—to become composite. But this seems impossible.<sup>42</sup>

If an argument is needed for this impossibility, consider one inspired by the Paradox of Increase.<sup>43</sup>

- (1) A simple object  $x$  incorporates  $y$  as a part at time  $t$ .
- (2) Necessarily, nothing can have a single proper part.
- (3) At  $t$ ,  $x$  is composed of  $y$  and the complement of  $y$  (i.e., all of  $x$  except for  $y$ ).
- (4) The complement of  $y$  exists prior to  $t$ .
- (5) Prior to  $t$ ,  $x$  has all of the same parts as the complement of  $y$ .
- (6) Necessarily, two distinct objects cannot have all of the same parts at the same time.

From these premises, we can derive that  $x$  is identical to one of its proper parts, a contradiction. For the original Paradox of Increase (involving

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<sup>40</sup>To ward off a possible confusion, while I previously put forward the "spatial souls" version of embodiment as an option for dualists, I did not do so because I find it a plausible view. Rather, some dualists believe it and none of Merricks's objections to Swinburne apply to it.

<sup>41</sup>As are Stephen T. Davis, "The Cosmological Argument and the Epistemic Status of Belief in God," in *Philosophy of Religion: A Reader and Guide*, ed. William Lane Craig (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), p. 89; and Charles Taliaferro, *Consciousness and the Mind of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 253. Tom Flint has also pointed out that the parts are not merely contingent but also created, which seems to entail that on Merricks's theory the Son becomes a creature, which is, to put it mildly, objectionable.

<sup>42</sup>Roderick Chisholm, "Reply to Philip L. Quinn," in *The Philosophy of Roderick M. Chisholm*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn (Chicago: Open Court, 1997), p. 68.

<sup>43</sup>Eric Olson, "The Paradox of Increase," *The Monist* 89.3 (2006), pp. 390–417.

composite objects acquiring parts), Merricks is most likely to favor denying (3), as it would be a consequence of the Doctrine of Arbitrary Undetached Parts (DAUP), and a good case can be made against this principle.<sup>44</sup> However, when applied to simples, (3) would seem to be true, even if DAUP is false. (4), (5), and (6) also appear to be true. But then (1) must be false; simples cannot gain parts.

The only way out for Merricks that I can see, short of adopting a metaphysical thesis (like that of temporal parts) that he rejects, is to claim that this sort of argument shows that a simple cannot incorporate a single proper part at a time, but it could incorporate multiple proper parts at a time. (5) is obviously true if  $x$  is incorporating a single part, but perhaps it is false if  $x$  acquires two or more parts at  $t$ . I must confess that I don't have a decisive argument against this kind of response, but it strikes me as weak. For instance, it would require the falsity of the following principle:

- (7) If, at  $t$ ,  $x$  incorporates  $n$  parts (and loses no parts), then, at  $t$ ,  $x$  has at least  $n + 1$  proper parts.<sup>45</sup>

In any ordinary case, the principle seems true. For example, if a carrot nose is added to a snowman made of three large snowballs at  $t$ , then at  $t$  the snowman has four proper parts (at that level of decomposition). Moreover, the proposed way out has bizarre consequences. If a simple tries to acquire a single part, it will fail, but if it tries for two or more it might succeed? That is like saying that a composite object with only two proper parts cannot lose one of its parts without ceasing to exist, but it could lose both and still exist (e.g., if God annihilated one of its parts, He would be annihilating the whole as well, but if He annihilated both parts at the same time, it could persist through such a loss). Worse, the parts must be incorporated at *exactly* the same time. If the simple tries to incorporate one part a picosecond before the other, it will fail. But could the possibility of incorporating a new part really hang on such a short period of time?<sup>46</sup>

It seems, then, that Plantinga's argument against physicalist incarnation does not require kind-essentialism, for there are plenty of other reasons one might have for thinking it impossible for an immaterial entity, particularly a divine immaterial entity, to become material. I have focused on Plantinga's objection to physicalist incarnation, but there are other problems as well. For example, Merricks's account entails that it is possible for a material object to be omniscient, and this is at least dubious, even if material objects can think (and, of course, there are well-known

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<sup>44</sup>Peter van Inwagen, "The Doctrine of Arbitrary Undetached Parts," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 62 (1981), pp. 123–137; Merricks, *Objects and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), pp. 48–53.

<sup>45</sup>(7) could use some precisifying (e.g., by adding language about levels of decomposition), but that much detail would only clutter up the paper without adding anything helpful.

<sup>46</sup>I am grateful to Josh Rasmussen for very helpful discussion of my argument for simples being essentially simple.

objections to the possibility of a material object's thinking).<sup>47</sup> But it is not necessary to discuss these issues. Merricks claimed that physicalism offers a superior account of the incarnation to that of dualism, and this is not the case. Even if all of the objections I have raised against physicalist incarnation have no merit whatsoever, this would at most leave physicalism and dualism on a par.

The above objections, however, do have some force. Consequently, Merricks is mistaken in thinking that the incarnation points us toward physicalism. His objections to dualist incarnation may be resisted and his own account entails the following.

- (8) Possibly, a non-spatial object becomes spatial.
- (9) Possibly, an unextended object becomes spatially extended.
- (10) Possibly, a necessary being is wholly composed of contingent parts.
- (11) Possibly, a simple becomes composite.

Many will find (8) through (11) impossible.<sup>48</sup> The incarnation, therefore, does not point us toward physicalism. On the contrary, given the incarnation, Christians should be dualists.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>See Plantinga, "Materialism and Christian Belief," in *Persons: Human and Divine*, ed. Peter van Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), pp. 105–118, 136–141.

<sup>48</sup>For the record, all of them strike me as impossible, but if I bracket my sympathies for compositional nihilism, then I find (8), (9), and (11) impossible and (10) dubious.

<sup>49</sup>I am grateful for helpful discussion and comments on previous drafts of this paper to Andrew Bailey, Nathan Ballantyne, Kenny Boyce, Tom Flint, Sam Grummons, Alex Plato, Josh Rasmussen, Mike Rea, and two anonymous reviewers.